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ABSTRACT

To examine the process of language shift (bilingualization) in an area where there is a local dialect equivalent to a "language of solidarity" and a national language equivalent to a "language of power," language interactions in the impoverished village of San Marcos in the highlands of Guatemala were examined. Although Spanish is the national language, approximately one half of Guatemalans are Mayan Indians (like the inhabitants of San Marcos), who speak one of at least 20 indigenous languages. An examination of linguistic practices indicated that Spanish words have been fully integrated into the dialect and that hispanicisms are frequently used to invoke a perception of the power and prestige of the dominant Spanish-speaking society. Greater hispanization was noted among younger unmarried men with few ties to the community and among older, prominent community men of elevated social status. Although the compulsory primary education includes Spanish, few children have achieved proficiency. Thus, the local language remains the language of ethnic identification and solidarity, while the national language is a means of acquiring status, recognition, and advancement. At present in Guatemala, therefore, economic and cultural factors are more decisive in the incipient bilingualization process than is schooling. (MM)

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SCHOOLING AND BILINGUALIZATION IN A HIGHLAND GUATEMALAN COMMUNITY

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Research studies of many world regions have documented processes of language contact and the replacement of "local" languages by "world" languages (Hymes 1961). As rural agrarian sectors are integrated into national economies, world languages differentiate into standards and vernaculars, and local languages become incorporated into systems of diglossia (Ferguson 1959, Fishman 1965). A hierarchical system of language diversity marked by shifts in language attitudes and functions accompanies the developing hierarchical politico-economic intergroup relations. In this complex, multi-dimensional process of language shift, it is often the local language that is retained as the "language of solidarity," while the world language is afforded the status of the "language of power" (Brown and Gilman 1960, see also, for example, Schieban-Lange 1977, Gal 1979 and Hill and Hill 1980).

In this paper I will discuss a small dimension of this phenomena as it occurs in the central highlands of Guatemala. The research data are not from a bi-ethnic community characterized by widespread bilingualism and diglossia; rather, they are from a mono-ethnic community where direct contact with the larger society is minimal and where most of the inhabitants are incipiently bilingual; that is, they have partial receptive control of the national language but they are, for the most part, incapable of producing complete utterances in that language. By investigating a community at the far end of the language shift continuum the mechanisms inhibiting and/or accelerating the process expectedly can be uncovered. In this paper, I will look briefly at aspects of the symbolic and functional role of the national language in the community under consideration and then examine the role of formal schooling and bilingualization.

Approximately one half of the seven million people of the Central American nation of Guatemala are Mayan Indians who speak one of at least twenty indigenous languages found within its borders. Spanish is the national language, and it exclusively is used in all governmental communication, in the national media, and in the urban public schools. Although much of the Guatemalan population is to some extent bilingual, the bilingualism is unidirectional; rarely does a member of the dominant ladino population understand or speak an indigenous language.

The indigenous ommunity of San Marcos, a township of about one thousand persons, is even by highland Guatemala standards, an unusually impoverished village. Because of dire economic straits, most villagers live in a perpetual state of debt; any cash that is obtained through the sale of fruit, wage labor or seasonal migration is used to pay off yesterday's debts. The villagers are near the end of a long chain of inter- and intra-ethnic exploitation, and quotidian economic needs take precedence over long range plans and decision making.

All language interactions among San Marcos community members are done in the local dialect of Cakchiquel, known by the Marquenos as tzojobal ('the medium of speech.') This

dialect is the primary symbol of Marqueño ethnic identity, and it is manipulated for ethnic boundary marking purposes (see Barth 1969, Giles et. al. 1977, Royce 1982). The villagers take great pride in their language, and although they are aware of the close similarity of proximal community dialects, they are quick to point out their structural differences and obvious inferiority (Richards 1982).

The San Marcos inhabitants believe that their distinctive dialect was given to their ancestors by the apostle Mark, and that it continues to survive in its "pure" form in the formal speech genre known as choloj. In Marqueño life, there are many speech contexts that require the use of this ancient speech genre, but close analysis of the "pure," ritualized speech, however, reveals the presence of considerable Spanish loan words introduced during the Colonial era (see Bricker 1974). These Spanish loan words (including those of Christian themes and socio-political organization) are fully integrated into the dialect and indeed are considered to be words of tzojobal origin. On the other hand, hispanicisms, which are recently introduced loan words and phrases not universally understood, are clearly recognized as borrowings from Spanish.

Hispanicisms are used by some in informal speech and particularly in contexts of 'impression management.' They, like code switching, have a metaphorical function (in the sense of Blom and Gumperz 1972), and are used in tzojobal speech to invoke the power and prestige of the dominant Spanish-speaking society. Although hispanization is a well-recognized communicative strategy there are, nevertheless, subtle sanctions against its inappropriate and overextended use.

Essentially there are two strata in the society in which relatively high rates of hispanization occur. One group consists of unmarried young men who have few binding ties to the community and are regarded by established community members as self-serving and disrespectful. They earn their cash primarily through day labor and seasonal migration, and they conspicuously display their acquired material goods (e.g., wrist watches, cassette players, sunglasses, etc.). Although their actual proficiency in Spanish may be quite minimal, they use considerable non-integrated, stereotyped Spanish phrases in their speech interactions with one another. The Spanish they use is familiar, authoritative and abrupt, and is reminiscent of that used by ladinos toward Indians or among ladino peers.

The second stratum displaying high rates of hispanization consists of older, prominent community men who have acquired prestige and status through their association and advancement in the status according civil and religious institutions. Because of the elevated social position these individuals hold, they reserve the right to use hispanicisms (but, nevertheless, limits are carefully monitored). Indeed,

there are both men and women in the community who have had greater exposure to Spanish and are more proficient in the language, but they tend not to 'drop' Spanish in their speech precisely because they do not have the appropriate level of community stature. The frequency of use of hispanicisms in the community is, therefore, more a reflection of male social status than actual Spanish proficiency. This becomes particularly apparent in drunken speech where more Spanish is heard among both men and women, old and young, prestigious or not, than among the same sober speakers. Drunken speech is unmonitored, and given the right context, many temporarily assume a ladino posture and try out their repressed, at times vulgar and abusive, Spanish language skills.

Aside from hispanicisms used within local language contexts, little elaborated Spanish is used within the village. Few outsiders come to the village, and consequently intra-community Spanish language use is limited to interactions with the resident representatives of the national society -- the teachers, the secretary and treasurer, and the telegraph operator. It is interesting to note that Spanish is spoken with these interlocutors regardless whether they are ladino or Indian. In San Marcos, a teacher and the town treasurer are Indians from larger, more modernized communities. They are addressed in Spanish, even by those who know very little of the language, because they are perceived as outsiders holding positions traditionally filled by ladinos.

The greatest and most sustained contact with Spanish village members have derives from the seven years of compulsory attendance at the national primary school. Potentially the school could provide the foundation for widespread societal bilingualism, but in actuality, few who know Spanish give much significance to class attendance in their second language acquisition process.

The stated goal of compulsory primary education in rural indigenous Guatemala is the integration of the Indian child into the national society through the teaching of oral and written Spanish. The underlying assumption is that a shared national language will generate a shared national identity. Few school-age Marqueño children, however, achieve the expressed goal of Spanish language proficiency. It is important to note nevertheless that village school children become as proficient in Spanish as they need to in order to survive in the classroom.

The national public education law states that all children from the ages seven through fourteen are required to attend primary school. The premise is that indigenous rural youth will enroll in Castellanización (a year of pre-school designed to help the indigenous child make the transition from home to school by teaching oral Spanish and introducing school culture) at the age of seven and that by age fourteen they will have completed the six grades of primary.

The reality is far from the expectation. In San Marcos, only approximately 75% of the total school-age population is

actually enrolled in school. Boys generally begin school at age seven and remain in school throughout their fourteenth year. Girls, however, rarely begin before age eight and the majority leave by the end of their thirteenth year. There is considerable social pressure among heads of household to have one's daughter out of school (that is, off the village paths and away from male age mates and ladino teachers) by age fourteen.

Although a child may be enrolled in school, his or her attendance is usually quite sporadic. Class attendance is poor partly because neither parents nor children understand the need for daily attendance, but mostly because child labor is needed for economic subsistence. Parents pull their children out of classes for days, weeks, and months at a time to help with domestic and agricultural tasks.

The effects of sporadic attendance is reflected in high retention and drop out rates. To illustrate, in 1980, approximately 50% of the students enrolled in Castellanizacion were children who were repeating the grade for the second, third, fourth and even fifth time. At the end of the school year, only half of these repeaters successfully passed on to first grade. Of those students who were enrolled in Castellanizacion for the first time in 1980, only 6% passed the year and the rest were required to repeat the grade the following year. Only approximately 15% of the San Marcos students ever achieve beyond the second grade of primary. Class enrollment figures of about 60 in Castellanizacion dwindle to about 30 by the second grade and decrease progressively thereafter.

Only three children in the history of compulsory schooling in San Marcos have completed the six grades of primary, and no one has left the community to attend secondary school. The parents do not have the resources to send their children for further schooling, and scholarships are next to impossible to secure. Parents question the value of sending their children to school when there are so few tangible rewards for having done so. Indeed, the lack of employment opportunities for graduates of primary school is a major factor in low school attendance and achievement. As one parent said, "Before we had our corn plots, our hoes, and our cane houses. Now we have schooling, and we still have our corn plots, our hoes, and our cane houses. What's the use?"

In the sixty years since primary education has come to San Marcos, mistrust, non-cooperation, and at best apathy have characterized the school-community relations. As we have seen, attendance is low, drop out rates are high, and school failure is endemic.

There are many factors that contribute to the above characterization, but a principal one is that classes are taught in Spanish by urban-oriented teachers whose training and pedagogical direction are ill-suited for the realities of rural indigenous Guatemala. A primary focus of instruction is the teaching of the national language, but oral Spanish production consists, for the most part, of only word-by-word

repetition by the class in unison of long lists of Spanish words. The Spanish the children hear in the classroom is essentially limited to the rote dissemination of the lesson and the repetitive reinforcement of restrictive and prescriptive classroom behavior rules. Few opportunties are ever given to the children to interact in the linguistic environment in order that they might formulate, apply, and modify language learning strategies necessary for the acquisition of the language in which they are being drilled (see, for example, Brown 1980, McLaughlin 1978, and Selinker 1972).

Soon into their primary education children acquire essentially all that they need to minimally survive in the classroom. Laying aside for the present the tacit messages of formal schooling, children learn first and foremost to respond quickly to the teachers' directives and to produce a small repertoire of essential Spanish phrases. The end product of this type of classroom dynamic involving uncontextualized memorization and repetition is that, if not much more, the students acquire the basic sound system of Spanish and learn certain phrases and directives that will be heard over and over again in their interactions with non-Indians.

What is found, then, is that the children who leave school are, for the most part, incipiently bilingual. Whether they become more bilingual is determined largely by the structure of economic and cultural opportunities open to them as men and women in the society.

Girls receive almost as much schooling as boys and, indeed, they leave school as proficient in Spanish as boys. Because of their role in Marqueño society, however, women tend to aquire few additional communicative skills in Spanish and, many women have claimed that after having left school they soon forgot much of what they had known. In the interim between leaving school and marriage, women are expected to begin displaying k'ixibal ('modesty') which means, among other things, that out of respect for oneself and one's family, idle interactions with men, outsiders, and particularly ladinos, are to be avoided. Unmarried women, like men, engage in seasonal labor migration to coastal coffee and cotton plantations, but they go accompanied by adult relatives or several village agemates and restrict their interactions with others. Although most women leave the village on a regular basis to sell goods, they travel to nearby indigenous markets where economic transactions are made in the mutually intelligible indigenous dialects. By the time women marry, they are restricted in movement by the overwhelming burdens of children and domestic chores. What is seen, then, is that over time women have fewer direct contacts with Spanish. Interestingly, women nearly consistently underestimate their Spanish language ability, and for certain pragmatic reasons, they deny and even mask their actual proficiency.

Men, in contrast, are expected to and do acquire further Spanish language skills following primary school. What they

acquire primarily, however, is not additional linguistic proficiency in the second language but rather sociolinguistic proficiency. That is, they, as non-native speakers, learn the cultural constraints and cultural norms of acceptable Spanish language use in specific social contexts.

School based linguistic skills tend to increase only slightly until men reach the age of about eighteen to twenty. At this stage in their social development men begin perfecting highly prized and respected public speaking skills in tzojobal (see Gossen 1974), and these skills of verbal competence tend to transfer to their production of Spanish. Within the structure of Marqueño society, men have more economic and cultural opportunities to interact in the Spanish context and thus increase communicative competence. Their role in society lies in the public domain, and as such their participation in civil, religious and economic affairs more readily places them in contact with government and religious officials and Spanish speaking entrepeneurs. They tend to buy and sell at regional markets where both ladinos and Indians frequent, and while working on the coastal plantations, they use Spanish as a lingua franca with ladinos and Indians from other parts of the country.

The overall Spanish language communicative competency of most Marqueno men is relatively minimal, but it is usually sufficient to get basic messages across in limited contexts. Among the adult population of San Marcos, only perhaps five percent, at best, are substantially bilingual. These individuals, in an effort to appear more 'progressive,' have made concerted efforts to make their speech less marked as "Indian Spanish." The potency of their messages as village mayor, Catholic Action president, cooperative officer, etc. requires higher levels of both linguistic and sociolinguistic Spanish proficiency. These people have secured their prestigious and relatively lucrative positions because they know the national language, but they also know the language as well as they do because of their position; the two components work together synergistically.

In summary, community members are aware of others' bilinguality and the degree to which they use one language or another. Rarely, however, are the differences in second language usage discussed without reference to one's progressiveness or conservativeness and social and economic standing, subtle as the distinctions may be. In the emergent language shift process as it is ocurring in one highland Guatemalan community, language attitudes toward the function and use of the national and indigenous language have evolved. The local language is retained as the language of ethnic identification and solidarity and is the means of acquiring resources within the ethnic community. The national language is reinforced as the language of power, and is valued as a means of acquiring status and recognition within the community and for advancing oneself through employment outside the community. The school plays a significant part in laying the foundation for bilingual development, but because of inadequate teaching methods and school policies,

prejudicial attitudes and deficient resources, its potential effectiveness for promoting national language acquisition is inhibited. As this paper has shown, factors external to schooling that condition economic and cultural opportunities to interact in the national language context are more decisive in the incipient bilingualization process.

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